



St Clare - statue in the chapel at Freeland

Putting Clare into Context: Clare and the Medieval Pattern of Holiness for Women

Sister Francisca OSC

How did Clare react to the theological understandings of women in her time? How did the Church and Society think women should behave; and what was the ideal of holiness set before them?

Early Christian thought, influenced by ancient Greek

philosophy, was misogynist and anti-feminist. Women were thought defective at all levels. Aristotle, Socrates, Pythagoras, in turn, considered women 'a deformity', 'a source of evil' and 'created by an evil principle'. However, the Christian ideal showed a high view of the

individual, and Jesus' attitude to women was atypical of his time; while the importance of Mary in devotion and theology gave women greater respect.

Even so, the patriarchal mentality contributed to an ambivalence, where women were seen as evil and temptress on one hand, while on the other praised as Judith, Ruth or Esther for the dubious exercise of

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Saint Clare

In this issue we aim to give an authentic presentation of St Clare, the pioneer and co-inspirer for all women of the Franciscan movement. She was not just a follower and counterpart of Francis, but a founder in her own right, with the strength of character and the wisdom to forge a new way of life, rooting the ideal of holy poverty deeply into the contemplative pattern. Here, Poor Clares today bring together considerable scholarship and research to show Clare's development of that ideal, and its relevance for today's world.

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their sexual attraction. Here were two inextricably entangled strands: one seeing women as man's complement and helpmate, equal heir to grace and salvation; the other a perpetual source of temptation and sin, subject to man as her master and lord.

In New Testament times women, initially, were active in mission and other work, as Paul depicts; but some became involved with heretical sects, for example Montanists and Gnostic groups, where they baptised and celebrated the Eucharist. In reaction, as the Sacraments became more formalised and structures more hierarchic, orthodox women were barred from such office and counselled to remain in their traditional roles as wife and mother. The maternal role was crucial, "She will be saved by childbearing" (1 Tim. 2: 10). With Mary as the unattainable model, women were to imitate her meekness, obedience and humility, all of which encouraged their repression and total subjection to father or husband.

Clare's spirituality was intensely feminine; and her letters included nuptial, motherhood and nurturing imagery, and symbols of bridal beauty and creativity, all transcending the contemporary pattern.

As related by Athanasius, Ambrose and Jerome, women who chose a life of virginity had to dress in black, have their hair cropped and covered by a black veil at their consecration by the bishop; and eat only one meal a day of bread and vegetables. They were to study the scriptures, rise during the night to pray, and gather together to chant the psalms at the traditional hours. The model for holiness was male; and sanctity was attained only through acquiring masculine virtues. The Church Fathers thought that virgins living an ascetic life could transcend their female sexuality and be transformed spiritually into men; so female saints like St. Brigid and St. Moninna are described as having masculine souls. What then was Clare's response to all this?

By contrast Clare, a devout girl, was initially given to much fasting and penance but modified her asceticism and counselled others to be prudent. Her spirituality was intensely feminine; and her letters included nuptial, motherhood and nurturing imagery, and symbols of bridal beauty and creativity, all transcending the contemporary pattern. Clare delighted in her womanhood.

Prayer, for Clare, meant essentially the Divine Office. We find from her letters that she was familiar with scripture and had a great love for the Office. So how did she fit with the history of the Liturgy of the Hours and especially as it affected Francis and his brothers? Its importance for her and her knowledge of the liturgical world of her day

are expressed in her Rule: "they may have breviaries"; and in her wish that the sisters should say the Office "after the manner of the Friars".

In the early Church the Divine Office was the prayer of all the faithful, not just of 'professionals' - priests, monks and nuns. Beyond question, the earliest Christians took with utmost seriousness the New Testament command to "pray without ceasing", and the Didache or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (c.50 AD) witnesses to the custom of praying the 'Our Father' three times daily when Christians met together. In time a vital principle of the Liturgy of the Hours came about, namely, to pray at the same time as others when separated physically. Acts 2 and other texts testify that the Christian community prayed together, taking over and adapting synagogue usage.

Later Tertullian and Hippolytus wrote of 'prescribed prayer', meaning prayer at morning and evening and the hours of Christ's passion, the third, sixth and ninth hours. These consisted of psalms, canticles and hymns, and were the common hours that marked the intervals of the day.

After the Peace of Constantine (312 AD), Christians could meet and pray together with public celebration and in parochial churches. Augustine relates how his mother went twice a day to church. The Cathedral and Peoples' Offices were colourful and lively, with candles and incense, the bishop in vestments and much singing. In contrast, monastic prayer at the time, as described by John Cassian, consisted of recitation of psalms at dawn and dusk, the principal object being to recite the whole psalter consecutively. Concentration on the words of psalms and readings was most important and quite unlike the ceremonial of the Cathedral Office.

While loving and appreciating the place of the Divine Office in daily life, Clare did not opt for lengthy and complex devotions which did not fit her vision of poverty and simplicity.

In the sixth century, with Benedict, the Office was all-important; and in the centuries following, more hymns, anthems and devotions were added, resulting in seven hours by day and one at night as the norm for monasteries, much less being used by the Church at large. So much was added that as many as fifteen books might be needed, a glorious and impressive cult, seen as sharing in the splendour of the worship of heaven. Offices for different occasions were arranged, and in some choirs a perpetual rota organised for chanting the Office day and night.

Clearly this was not for Francis and

itinerant brothers. Major simplification was necessary all round, resulting eventually, after the Gregorian reforms of the eleventh century, in a 'breviary', still quite a large book. This was used by Innocent III and later taken all through Europe by the Friars. Francis' own breviary, still preserved in Assisi, is a true liturgical treasure. It is the most ancient witness to Innocent's reformed liturgy, and perhaps the oldest portable breviary containing rubrics. Francis also added his own extra 'little offices' and devotions.

The situation for Clare and her sisters was basically different from that of the friars, since they had 'a place', a small monastery with church and choir. The more stable life and the education of some of the Poor Ladies meant that the Divine Office came more naturally to them than to the brothers. However, Clare, like Francis, avoided liturgical over-load. While loving and appreciating the place of the Divine Office in daily life, she did not opt for lengthy and complex devotions which did not fit her vision of poverty and simplicity. Clare of Assisi, responding to God's call, remodelled religious life for women and adapted its worship, at every level retaining self-hood and femininity for herself and others. *f*



Sister Francisca OSC has been a Poor Clare nun for 45 years. She has an MA for which her dissertation was on Paradigms of Female Sanctity in the Early Church, and has recently been awarded a PhD for her thesis on The Early History of the Liturgy of the Hours. In her community she is the cook.

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Clare: Abbess and Servant

Elizabeth CSF

Opposite the entrance to the monastery of San Damiano on the lower slopes of Assisi's hill is a bronze statue of St Clare, holding up a monstrance. A strong patrician face looks out over the plain; and her attitude of command, even defiance, was reputedly sufficient to halt the advancing Saracen marauders, sending them into retreat and confusion. A model for the authority of an Abbess?

Clare's way was different: she is recognised as a leader rather than as authoritarian. In her, authority, as its root implies, is creative and nourishing, authenticating herself and others.

Leadership is a God-given charism, enabling others to respond and follow in a relationship of mutual trust, listening and receiving from each other.

For each of us the influences we experience and the choices we make from a young age, forge our character. Clare's mother, a noble lady, ran a household of servants and had several sons and daughters, of whom Clare was the eldest. Influential in the city, Ortolana gathered others who visited the sick and dispensed charity in the neighbourhood. Clare would have absorbed and learnt from her mother's role, unconsciously developing her own strengths.

Three words - sister, mother, servant - exemplify, in her Rule, her attitude to the role of Abbess.

With the combined example of a mother who went on pilgrimages when such ventures were risky, and of Francis as he found his way, it is not surprising that Clare should have set out on her own difficult path. Her way of complete poverty involved great courage and perseverance especially in the face of strong opposition from her family, and of the Church's view that such a life was too severe for a woman. But initial trials of excessive fasting and mortification led Clare to recommend "reasonable" sacrifice.

Her first little group had no official leader for three years. They made decisions together, recognised mutual needs, responsibilities and tensions between individual and community. So they began to forge appropriate structures. Much of this becomes clear from Clare's Rule.

At the time, any of the approved Rules, of Benedict, Augustine, Basil or Pachomius, might be adopted by a new community. But none would allow for the possibility of absolute poverty which Clare felt essential, nor provide for the relationship of her group to the friars. Nor did Clare look for the honour and status often seen in Benedictine

leadership, influential, wealthy, allowing personal servants and separate quarters.

Monasteries of women were often founded by rich and influential families, as places where unmarried daughters could safely be placed. Without vocation, these women had to live by one of the known rules and were subject to ecclesiastical authority, with an Abbess appointed by the family or the Church. A class system inevitably resulted with servants doing the manual work of the monastery. Clare soon left the Benedictine house, her first lodging, and spent some months with a group, possibly Beguines, living a poor and penitential life with no named leader.

Their example inspired her, as did that of Francis who received men from all strands of society, requiring only that property or money should be given away, so that mutual dependence and brotherhood were engendered. Clare's way was not quite as either, and the group which started at San Damiano had to make its own life.

Clare did not wish to be Abbess, but Francis and the Bishop of Assisi laid it on her as obedience, knowing that an approved Rule and an Abbess were essential for the Church's approval. Clare accepted this and grew into the situation through service to the community. With no blueprint, the little group learned through trial and error. Her Rule, later, makes clear that the relationship of the sisters with the friars was to be for sacramental provision and spiritual help, a bond of love in no way impinging on their own form of government.

Even poverty was to be observed with respect for individual need; the sick, especially, should have extra care.

Three words - sister, mother, servant - exemplify, in her Rule, her attitude to the role of Abbess. The relationship of a sister echoed the attitude of the Lord; she was equal with the others, one among them and not separate "in the common life, especially in whatever pertains to the Church, the dormitory, infirmary, clothing."

As mother she was to be "committed to the



service and welfare of the Sisters" in justice, charity and compassion. In fact, "all should treat others as they would wish to be treated". The Abbess would have no privilege, and be there for all "lest despair overcome the weak." For "if a mother love and cherish her child according to the flesh, how much more lovingly must not a Sister love and nourish her Sister according to the Spirit".

Clare wanted the Sisters to "manifest their needs with confidence". Even poverty was to be observed with respect for individual need; the sick, especially, should have extra care. She saw status, wealth and property as fostering the abuse of power, so insisted that the Abbess must profess and "maintain the form of poverty to which they are promised". She was to be chosen by common consent and might be removed from office if incapable or incompetent.

Decisions, especially in matters incurring debt, were to be made by the group: all must be consulted "for the Lord often reveals to the least what is best to be done". Work was shared and a weekly chapter met to discuss "whatever pertains to the welfare and good

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Elizabeth has been a member of the Community of St Francis for 51 years; she is ordained and now lives in Stepney.



In Touch with a Living Tradition

Gillian Clare OSC

At Christmas 1984 I received an unexpected gift: an invitation to share a session in Brussels on the writings of Clare. There were then no opportunities in this country for Franciscan studies. There had been one session on Franciscan sources at the Poor Clare monastery in Darlington in 1977, and that had been all. Since the early 1960s, however, we had been corresponding with Poor Clare monasteries abroad as we were the obvious opportunity for any Poor Clares who felt encouraged by Vatican II to be ecumenical. We had also had very friendly contacts with the Poor Clares in this country, who invited us to meetings as soon as they formed their Association. This invitation seemed an opportunity not to be missed. It proved deeply rewarding, and I was able to share later sessions on Franciscan writings with sisters from Belgium, France and Africa.

The people involved in the first session had been responsible for the recent French/Latin edition of the writings of Clare. This had pointed out that Clare had been the first woman to write a religious rule for women. Earlier ones had been written by men. As our earliest sisters had written their own rule, inspired by that of Clare, this had obvious resonances for us. We had never tried to copy exactly the Poor Clare pattern as then

Over the years I have come to believe that our experience has been surprisingly close to that of Clare and her first sisters

understood. Anglican communities which were inspired by traditions in the Roman Catholic Church had frequently adopted the original texts as a basis for their practice. As one recent writer on the Desert Fathers has pointed out, the rule provides the ideal. Pachomius wrote a rule and that is all we have, but where another rule (that of the White Monastery) is available with supplementary letters which reveal the practice of that rule, we have a much more complete picture (of fallibility). During the twenty years or so between Vatican II and my first visit to Belgium the Poor Clares throughout the world had been working on revising their Constitutions which interpret the Rule in the present day. Much had changed in their practice. We discovered that they could recognise our Rule as very close to their current practice and very close in spirit. We had built a chapel and parlour in 1960. When Brother David mentioned the question of the grille to Sr Gwenda Mary, she said that we would have grilles when the friars had the tonsure. She said that his hand went up to his thick dark hair and she heard no more of grilles. A community of Poor Clares in Belgium had to build a new chapel at the same time, and found it necessary to incorporate grilles which were difficult to

remove a few years later. We were fortunate in our liberty and in our timing!

Over the years I have come to believe that our experience has been surprisingly close to that of Clare and her first sisters. We have been small, close to the other parts of the Franciscan family, and, if poverty is defined as dependence on God, we have been poor. The precarious nature of our life was brought home to some of the sisters on the continent when I was asked to speak about our experience at an Assembly of contemplative communities in Strasbourg. When I pointed out that if one of their houses had to close, there was always another house of the same Order which could receive the remaining sisters, but that if we reached such a point there was no other house to take us in, it clearly made an impression. Clare's own precarious situation can be seen in the intensity of her response to Agnes of Prague. It must have been an immense comfort to have her cause taken up by someone in such a position. No wonder she describes Agnes as 'half of her own soul'.

Clare said that the Office was to be said according to the custom of the Friars Minor. In recent years with the production of the Daily Office SSF we have found it appropriate to use that to a considerable extent (though we also still use the equivalent of the Office of Readings). Once again our history has echoed that of the early Franciscans who found a need for a breviary rather than the large volumes of the monastic office. The success of the Daily Office SSF has contributed something to Anglican liturgical development, and we have shared in that.

In 1994 I was able to share a session at UNESCO in Paris for the end of the Clare's eighth centenary year. I was lucky enough to be able to stay with the Poor Clares near UNESCO and to share the celebration at Notre Dame on the Sunday with many Poor Clares from various parts of France, Africa, and Canada. It was a unique experience, but even more essential have been our friendships with the Poor Clares in this

country. They generously joined with us in celebrating the golden jubilee of this community during the meeting of the Assembly in 2000. We continue to share with them any gatherings that come along and were particularly glad to be able to welcome one of three Chapters of Mats for sisters of the Association last year. The sisters met at our guest house but overflowed into the convent which was happy for us all. There are also the yearly Poor Clare Formation courses at Arkley which include other Franciscans as opportunity offers, and other monastic courses. Recently we have appreciated the TV presentation of the life by the sisters at Arundel.

If poverty is defined as dependence on God, we have been poor.

Since our early beginnings the sharing of life and resources with other parts of the Franciscan family has become much more evident. Again we echo Clare's links with the other Franciscans of her time. Apart from ecumenical contacts we have been able to welcome the First Order and the Third Order to our guest house since we acquired it in 1965, and we have been glad to have as chaplains first the brothers of the First Order, then sisters of the First Order, and now members of the Third Order who kindly help us on occasion. We have also done an increasing amount of printing for the other Orders since we started the printing house in 1964. We have taken an increasing part in some of the annual Chapters and in the General Chapters of the First and Third Orders. We are always glad to welcome a First Order Chapter to the guest house, especially as it gives us a chance to meet the members informally, if briefly.

For a religion concerned with incarnation nothing is as valuable as the personal contacts which embody the shared spirit, and lead us on together. *f*



Sister Gillian Clare was a member of the Community of St Clare at Freeland from 1960 until her death in November 2006.

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*

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*

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of the monastery". This included the acceptance of new members. "If by divine inspiration anyone should come to us desiring to embrace this form of life, the Abbess must seek the consent of all the Sisters". After all, they would have to live together with all who came.

Clare acknowledged weakness and failure at the regular meeting where all "must confess their common and public offences and negligences". Correction was to be without anger. No command must be "against their soul and the form of our profession".

As servant she followed the example of Christ, wanting to serve and if necessary to suffer for them. The Abbess, in humility, was to allow the sisters to expect and demand service from her. She wanted to be on such terms of relationship with them "that they may speak and act with her as mistresses with their servant; for thus it ought to be, that the Abbess be the servant of all the sisters".

She hoped to lead by example "of virtue and holy behaviour" so that the sisters would "obey more out of love than fear". This would be "according to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ". Clare's whole following of the Lord was a form of her own obedience, taking the meaning of that word seriously, as literally 'ob audire' -- 'out of listening'. *f*

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Although this popular icon is often thought to be of St Clare, recent research indicates that it is most likely to be St Agnes of Prague. Clare and Agnes never met, but as Agnes founded her Order because of the influence of the Franciscan brothers she had met in Prague, she wrote to Clare for advice. The two women were of considerable support to one another in their dedication to poverty and prayer. Clare's four Letters to Agnes are included among her writings available today.

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The One Thing Necessary - What is it?

"But because one thing is necessary, I bear witness to that one thing." (St Clare)

Briege O'Hare OSC

It is a brave woman indeed who would take her stand on one side, contrary to the mind of Rome, and on the other side, contrary to the prevailing view of so many of her peers. What makes the drama all the more interesting is the fact that the protagonists involved are no ordinary people. This is the stuff of great theatre.

On one side we have Gregory IX, a 13th Century Pope and one of the most powerful figures in the known world. On the other we have Clare of Assisi, daughter of the aristocratic Favorone family. The issue of conflict is brought to a head in the person of a royal princess, Agnes of Prague, daughter of King Premysl Ottokar I of Bohemia: Agnes, who sometime previously had heard Franciscan friars preach in Prague, was so profoundly affected that she knew she was called to leave her royal household and join the Franciscan Order. The friars doubtless told her of Clare and so Agnes wrote to the Holy See for permission to establish a monastery of Poor Ladies in Prague. The monastery was established in 1234. Within a short period of about a year, the conflict erupted.

The issue was about poverty. For Gregory, it had proved an unworkable ideal, which militated against his vision for women's religious life. For a number of years he had been pursuing an agenda of reform in women's religious life and to this end he wrote a Rule, which was to serve this reform. His model, which was generic for all women religious, emphasised strict enclosure, separation from the world and non-communication both within and outside the monastery. This is what he sent to Agnes of Prague as the official Rule for her new monastery. Clare disagreed. For Clare, poverty was not an ideal. It was the heart and essence of the gospel. It was the

gateway into the freedom and joy of experiencing oneself as Jesus did, as the beloved one of God. It was, to use Clare's own words, to be "caught up in the embrace" of God. It is this conflict between Clare's reading of the gospel and the mind of Gregory IX, which caused Clare to write what we know as her second letter to Agnes. It was probably written sometime in 1235.

Agnes was in crisis. She knew where her heart was. It was with the energy and beauty of the gospel vision of Francis and Clare. But her dilemma is not unfamiliar to so many of us in today's church. Where is her obedience? Is it to the Holy See? Is she just following her own will in her attraction to what she knows of Clare and her sisters? Gregory wanted Agnes to ensure financial security for her monastery and he had made it clear that failure to provide for this would be irresponsible on Agnes's part. Agnes had built a Hospice beside the monastery and Gregory wanted the income from this to be transferred directly to the monastery for the support of the sisters and the maintenance of the monastery. Isn't this a highly sensible arrangement? Wouldn't freedom from financial worry make a life of prayer all the more serene and untroubled? And would it not also ensure that the sisters need not "trouble" people by depending on them for their material needs? Such dependence might cause all sorts of interactions with the local people that might lead to failures in silence, recollection, enclosure, and so on.

Clare's views on gospel poverty were an irritant to Gregory. Only six years previously, he had taken the trouble to visit Clare at San Damiano to persuade her to give up her convictions. He offered to make provision for her monastery so that Clare and her sisters could live according to his model of religious life. "If you have fear for your vow", he said, "I absolve you from it". "Holy Father", she said, "I will never in any way wish to be absolved from the following of Christ." Notice her language. The Pope was proposing his preferred version of religious life but Clare in effect told him that his project was anti-gospel! She did not want to be dispensed from "following Christ".

So what have we here? What is the heart of the issue? Clare has no doubt in her mind what it is. It is about obedience to the Holy Spirit. It is about knowing that one's whole life is led "...by the Spirit of the Lord and the Spirit's holy manner of working" (Rule of

Clare 10). This was something that both she and Francis often repeated. In her second letter to Agnes, Clare sets out her conviction very clearly. With amazing certainty she declares, "One thing is necessary and I bear witness to that one thing." (Clare's *Second Letter to Agnes*, verse 9 i.e. 2LAG 9) What is this one thing? Clare's answer comes as a surprise to the reader. She says, "Be conscious of your beginning." What does she mean? The clue is in what she says previous to this statement, "Like another Rachel, remember and be conscious...." Rachel, whose very name means, "see your beginning", was to the medieval mind the model of the truly contemplative woman, the one who "sees". For Clare it's all about seeing, remembering, and being conscious. Only the contemplative mind can "see". In the context of Agnes's dilemma, Clare advises her to see with the eyes of the spirit, to re-connect with the original moment of discovery of one's spiritual calling. Not in the sense of a role within the Church but in the reality of the discovery of one's deepest spiritual identity; to remember this; to be conscious of this, "not believing anything, not agreeing with anything that would dissuade you from this or that would place a stumbling block in your way." (2LAG 14)

Clare does not tell Agnes what decision to make about the exterior form of her monastic life. She points Agnes to that Kairos moment, that moment of original seeing, that moment of connection with the divine essence within, that moment of consciousness of being 100% alive in God and she says, live a form of life which makes this inner reality your normal reality. For Clare, as for Francis, only highest poverty opens the way to such an experience. In this is the essential genius of the mystical insight of Francis and Clare. All the great contemplatives and mystics tell us that we can experience total aliveness in God during contemplation and this is true. However, what Clare is telling us is that if we want to experience our everyday life as lived from our deepest spiritual identity, then highest poverty is the way. "O holy poverty, God promises the Kingdom of Heaven to those who possess and desire you." (1LAG 16) With a subtle reference to Pope Gregory's project, Clare says to Agnes,

"If anyone would tell you something else, or suggest something that would seem contrary to your divine vocation, even though you must respect him, do not obey his counsel."

Then in her gift for getting to the heart of the matter in simple language, Clare adds, "But as a poor virgin, embrace the poor Christ." (2LAG 17,18) f



Briege O'Hare is a Poor Clare.
Her monastery is in Dundalk, Ireland where she and her sisters live a contemplative life inspired by the Rule of Clare and St. Francis' Rule for Hermitages. The architecture of the monastery is based on the celtic monastic model.

Minister's Letter

Brother Samuel SSF
Minister Provincial of the First Order Brothers,
European Province, writes:

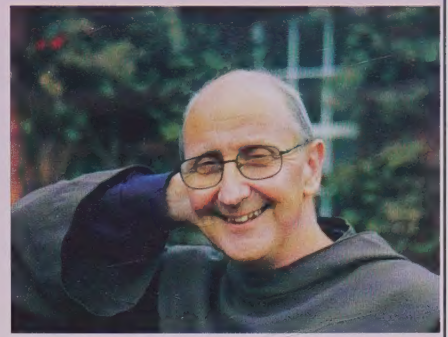
Dear Friends,

At boarding school in the early sixties it was elastic-sided shoes that were the problem; they were considered by the school authorities to be 'slovenly', presumably because they didn't require the effort of tying up laces. They were the cause of much controversy, and to wear them openly on the street or to classes was seen as subversive of all that the school was supposed to stand for.

More than forty years on clothes continue to be contentious; today it's the *niqab*, the veil worn by some Muslim women, which is giving rise to passionate debate. For those who choose to cover their faces in this way it's a matter of modesty, even of safety, before the prying eyes of men, but it has also come to be an issue of identity for Muslims living in a culture which is at best unsympathetic and at worst hostile to all that Islam stands for. On the other hand, for many in our predominantly secular society it's a sign of an archaic submission of women to men and a refusal to integrate with the norms of modern Western culture. To some white Europeans it seems that the wearing of the full face veil, or even the headscarf, in schools, hospitals and other public places is an unwelcome intrusion of religion into the public sphere; all religious symbols, some say, should be kept to the realm of the private.

The trouble is that it's hard to draw lines in this debate; what may be offensive to one tradition can be quite innocuous to another and vice-versa; uncovered thighs, shoulders and midriffs can seem an in-your-face expression of sexuality to a good many people, not just to the devout Muslim, but we would think twice about banning all bareness in public spaces. Can the wearing of a crucifix be a problem in certain circumstances? And how do we define what is public? Have we so lost our nerve about religious toleration and the vision of a multicultural society that there needs to be a new dress code that outlaws any public demonstration of religious commitment?

When visiting the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi what moves me more than the Giotto or Cimabue frescoes, more even than the tomb of St Francis itself, are the relics displayed in the chapel to the side of the Lower Church, among them Francis' habit made of coarse cloth, 'patched within and without'. True, he wore it as a Christian symbol in an overwhelmingly Christian society, but its roughness and humility reminds us that it was also something of a subversive garment, a protest against the finery which he chose to put aside, an identification with the last and the least who lived on the margins of society. Perhaps this was the very same habit Francis wore when he went to meet



Sultan Malek al-Kamil in Egypt in 1219, approaching him humbly as a fellow spiritual seeker and being in turn received graciously and attentively, providing us with a model of Muslim-Christian dialogue from which we can learn today.

Though it's better cut than Francis', not quite so patched and conveniently drip-dry, I value my habit and what it can signify. I'm glad to wear it in schools and hospitals, on the Underground and in the street. I hope it doesn't cause offence or give rise to fear in others; I receive some odd looks and occasionally a ribald remark, but also often a smile and a greeting. May it identify me as having reverence towards others of all faiths and of none, and be a witness to the compassion and love of Christ for the world.

Pax et Bonum

Samuel SSF

Theme Reflection

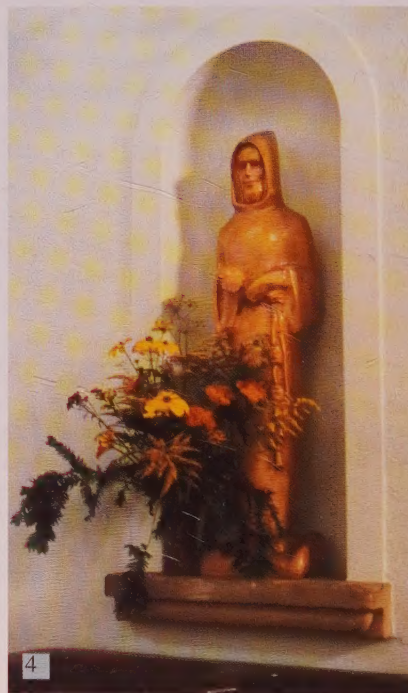


Clare's words to Agnes of Prague
for Reflection on the Crucifix:

Place your mind in the mirror of eternity;
place your soul in the splendour of glory;
place your heart in the icon
of the substance divine;
and contemplating, be transformed
into the image
of the Godhead Itself.

The Order of S

Welcome to the Order of St Clare! However, (1) you will not often see the sisters gathered around the front door, as in this photo taken in 2005, as they are an enclosed order and go about their life in a 'hidden' way. Those present on this occasion were: Margaret, Maria - Poor Clare from Paderborn, Gillian Clare, Patricia, Kathleen Marie, Michaela, Paula, Damien, Susan Elisabeth (behind), Mary Kathleen, and Alison Francis. (2) This is the back view of their convent, with the chapel to the left. The main house was built in 1876, the chapel in 1960. (3) shows the interior of the chapel as it was until August 2006. (4 & 5) The chapel niches hold figures sculpted by Sister Angela, including St Clare (front page of this magazine), St Francis, and St Mary with the infant Jesus. (6) Prayer is the main work of the sisters, and the cat knows to take its place as occasion arises. The sisters carry out other activities to support themselves, including running a printing press, (7) producing communion wafers, growing their own vegetables and selling produce such as eggs and jam. (8) The sisters ask God's blessing on their vegetable garden each rogationtide, (9) and even the pet geese admire the harvest. (10) The morning tasks involve everyone in vegetable preparation for the day, (11) as the sisters cater also for those in their guesthouse, the Old Parsonage, in an adjacent property.



lare, Freeland



Community Routes

◆ ◆ A Future with Hope: General Chapter, 11-15 September 2006

Like the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, the General Chapter of SSF makes no decisions - but is nonetheless of great significance in the life of our Province. We gather, we pray together, we worship together, together we listen to the invited speakers and to each other as we respond to them, we share delicious meals and the accompanying conversation, we share information about our houses and our work, we relax and laugh together, we seek out old friends and make new ones. Finally, we disperse to our various destinations and tasks knowing that it's up to us to make full use of all that was offered to us in those three short days. (We were at St Gabriel's Conference Centre, Ditchingham, Norfolk).

The Bishop Protector, on the first morning, took us straight to Assisi and to Francis' encounter with the Lord in the tumbledown church of San Damiano - 'Go, build my church...' This was not just about conservation. What sort of church was Francis to build, are we to build? Bishop Michael faced us with the great divide which exists about biblical authority - the divide which is behind all the controversy on gender and sexuality. He also spoke about love for the church, so evident in the life of Francis, so forgotten in life today. He very tentatively offered his suggestions about directions we might take in our search for a Franciscan identity in the twenty-first century.

Bishop Gordon Mursell (Bishop of Stafford) was passionate on Jeremiah as a prophet of hope in a time of crisis.

Sister Jane Bertelsen, Provincial of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, described the process of renewal among her own sisters, who are gathering for their General Chapter in May, 2007. They are looking for authentic Franciscan living and find (as we do) that it's easier to found than to refound an order. There's an ongoing struggle between tradition and reality. We love activity, but we need the gospel.

Yes, we did have small groups which met for morning prayer, and to consider questions posed by the speakers. And yes, there was fun on the last evening in the form of a party with entertaining contributions from sisters and brothers who prefer to remain anonymous.

An old friend of ours, the Revd John Austen, acted as facilitator of the Chapter and was very unobtrusive until the final (and crucial) plenary session when he leapt into prominence as a chairman who inspired confidence in him, and



*'we pray together, we worship together ...' a Eucharist with **Nicholas Alan** as deacon, **Bishop Michael Perham** presiding, and **Jason Robert** as server.*



*'we share delicious meals and the accompanying conversation...' **Liz, Beverley, Christine James, Mark Edmund, Austin and Benjamin.***



*'we relax and laugh together ...' **Benedict, Oswin Paul and Joyce** were among the more ardent jig-saw puzzlers.*



The three friars who were ordained deacon this year:

Alan Michael, Nicholas Alan and Kevin.

in ourselves. So, thank you John, and thank you speakers, and thank you all who worked hard to plan and lead.

◆ ◆ Beverley to York in Six Days

Mark Edmund continues to enjoy the annual pilgrimage of the the Pilgrims of St Francis. Kathleen Holford's article on page 16 tells more of what is involved for those who belong the 'the Pilgrims'. Here, Mark Edmund writes of his most recent pilgrimage:

The Pilgrims of St Francis walked the Minster Way from Beverley to York in August 2006, over a period of six days sleeping in church and village halls en route. The weather was kind and rain when it did happen seemed to be mostly at night once we had arrived at our destination for the day or very brief showers that didn't last long during the day.

The group of pilgrims this year was a mixed bunch of people from pre-teens to people in their eighties, so there is no excuse not to join in on the grounds of age. I was very surprised at how flat the walk was generally, there were only a couple of days that had hills and only one day that had a very steep hill.

The walks on average were 8 - 10 miles per day and were taken at the pace of the average walkers with frequent stops for those who were slower to catch up. There was a great sense of fellowship over the week with people doing things together and living very simply alongside each other and helping each other to share the journey and many friendships were formed that will carry on long after the pilgrimage finished.

Prayer was an important and frequent part of each day and although there was somebody in overall control of organising the prayers, they were shared out so that those who wished to could lead the group in praying together. The pilgrimage began with a Eucharist in Beverley Minster and finished with a Eucharist in York, unfortunately not in the Minster although there was a guided tour of York Minster for those who wished to look round that wonderful building.

One of my memories of this walk was

trying to get across an area of deep mud caused by rain and a herd of cows drinking from their water trough and churning up the ground around it, this being the only way we could exit the field to get where we needed to be. But once again that great sense of togetherness came to the fore with people helping each other across, the front people finding footholds for those following and people offering arms

and hands to help each other cross over until everybody was safely back onto firm ground without anybody having an unwanted mud bath!

I look forward to next year's pilgrimage from Sherborne to Glastonbury and picking up the friendships made on previous pilgrimages, and once again being part of that wonderful fellowship that is the Pilgrims of St Francis.

◆ ◆ Justice, Peace and the Environment - a London view

Hugh, resident in the East End of London, is involved in a variety of events and networks. Here, he writes of some recent activities.

Our parishioners come from many countries, especially in Africa. When relatives visit they often experience bureaucratic problems. Our parish belongs to London Citizens - churches, mosques, trade unions and schools working together for the common good. I joined a Citizens team at Lunar House, the Home Office Immigration Directorate in Croydon, to investigate stories of lost passports and long queues. We offered Home Office clients refreshments in a caravan parked nearby and invited them to complete a questionnaire. The enquiry led, via a meeting in the House of Lords, to the publishing of our recommendations, which the Home Office itself agrees are necessary, e.g. Halal food in the canteen is simple; whereas a reliable system to track documents will be costly. I'm on a monitoring group holding the Home Office to account. One day when a parishioner was threatened with deportation, we had the contacts and confidence to get him released from detention.

London Citizens supports low paid, migrant cleaning staff in their demand for the London Living Wage, rather more than the National Minimum Wage. 'Low paid cleaners are an essential part of every University.... They are poorly paid, receive no holiday or sick pay. Contracted cleaners

are academia's dirty secret. But last Thursday, Queen Mary, part of the University of London, voted to abolish poverty pay.' (*The Guardian*). London Citizens hopes other colleges and businesses will follow suit.

I joined the campaign against next year's International Arms Fair at the nearby Excel Exhibition Centre. I have prayed with members of other faiths at St Ethelburga's, the city church that became a centre of reconciliation after an IRA bomb. I attended public events calling for Norman Kember's release and for a cease-fire in Lebanon.

Climate change steadily rises up our agenda. I have been privileged to hear Professor James Lovelock - of the Gaia theory - controversially calling for an immediate increase in nuclear power. I have also heard Clare Foster, the Church of England environment advisor, inviting us to measure and then cut our fuel usage in each of our church buildings in the Shrinking the Footprint campaign. In working for justice, peace and the environment, there is much happening in London.

◆ ◆ St Deiniol's

Colin Wilfred writes about a recent visit: St Deiniol's Residential Library is at Hawarden in North Wales, about ten miles from Chester. It contains the Bishop Moorman Franciscan collection, which has about two thousand items in it. The library has slowly been building up a modern Franciscan section and SSF is making suggestions as to how it can be strengthened, particularly as this province is giving a modest amount each year to help with this. The Library has a quarter of a million books (mainly theology and history) and a similar number of manuscripts. It was founded by Gladstone in the nineteenth century and there is a number of scholarships and bursaries to help with costs. The atmosphere is a combination of an academic (but not heavy) community and a country house hotel. I would strongly recommend it for anyone wanting to do some serious reading and/or writing. The address is: St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Flintshire CH5 3DF www.st-deiniols.org

◆ ◆ Round up

In East London, the brothers have moved from St Martin's to St Matthias' vicarage, where **Mark Edmund** and **Hugh** are now resident. **Martin John** was admitted as a novice on 24 October, following which he moved to Glasshampton. **Oswin Paul** moved to Hilfield in November. **Noel Nikki** and **Patteson Kwa'ai** from the Pacific Islands Province are spending time in the U.K. **Martin Philip** has been released from vows and from membership of SSF.

In the Second Order, three of the sisters at Freeland have died recently: **Elsie Felicity** on 7 September, **Gillian Clare** on 8 November and **Patricia** on 12 November. May they rest in peace and rise in glory. *f*

Franciscans in Dialogue

Colin Wilfred SSF

Some years ago a friend brought back from holiday a picture of a fresco of St. Francis in a church. Nothing unusual about that, you might think, but it was a Greek Orthodox fresco in a church in Crete and normally Eastern Orthodox do not give honour to Western saints post the 1054 schism. Once again, as the old Heineken advert had it Francis is able 'to reach parts that others can't'!

In December 2002 a group of Franciscan friars and sisters, members of Anglican, Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities from 7 different countries, gathered in Italy for the first official 'Inter-Franciscan Dialogue'. In September 2006 the second such meeting took place for five days in Canterbury at the Franciscan International Study Centre. This time there were 23 participants from ten different Orders/Congregations/Communities from Italy, the United Kingdom, Turkey, the United States, Australia and Canada. Each person had been officially appointed for this ecumenical experience and task.

The theme this time was 'From Rule to Life' exploring the different Rules under which Franciscan brothers and sisters live and how these impact on our daily life both together and in mission. However, this was not meant to be a study seminar with learned papers by academics but living together as a Franciscan community - sharing an 'ecumenism or dialogue of life', sharing experiences of prayer, of memories, of hope and of projects.

We met in prayer three times a day, including in the morning for *lectio divina* with prayerful reflection on the gospel of the day in small groups, and for a corporate evening prayer. On such ecumenical

occasions, the celebration of the Eucharist can often be the source of painful conflict and so the community decided to have a 'Eucharistic fast' at midday with silent prayer in the presence of the blessed sacrament in the chapel or in one's room - a costly experience but peaceful.

Each day, a different group would make a presentation of the Rule under which they were living. Some live under Rules coming from Francis and Clare in the thirteenth century. The Roman Catholic Third Order Regular (the majority of Catholic Franciscans) live under a Rule last revised in 1982. We Anglicans live under a Rule which includes the Principles of the Society of Saint Francis, first compiled in the 1920s and 30s for a Christian ashram in India and then brought to England and gradually adopted by other Anglican Franciscan groups. Not very surprisingly, there were constant 'cries of recognition' as different sisters and brothers discovered the common notes of the different movements which make up the Franciscan symphony. As always much of this process of sharing and discussion goes on informally at the meal table, in the corridors and common rooms; links and friendships are made, plans for future mutual visits and activities.

We tried to begin to respond to the

challenges which the planning group had given us:

'What is franciscan ecumenism?

What unites us even in our division?

What is our role in the relations between churches and within our own churches?

What is taught in our faculties and to our friars and sisters about Franciscan ecumenism?

How are we to understand a Franciscanism rooted in the essentials of the Gospels, not touched by divisions? Could this be a way to unity?

The group committed itself to continue to meet every two years in an international gathering, the next being in Washington DC 2008, and in the intervening year to meet nationally or regionally. In this country it is planned that a group will meet in Easter week 2007. Hopefully, if we can establish such a regular rhythm of breathing in and out of the Spirit of unity, we can make an ecumenical contribution of Franciscan warmth in a time when official church dialogues and cooperation seem to be entering an 'ice-age'.

Meeting in the context of Canterbury with a christian history back to the third century of our era; renewed by the coming of Augustine in 597 at the instigation of Pope Gregory; the place where the first Franciscans settled led by Agnellus of Pisa sent by St. Francis; the see whose Archbishops in the sixteenth century and beyond embraced the Reformation and the Mother church of the Anglican Communion, it was an obvious place for us Franciscans to go on pilgrimage together. We prayed at Greyfriars, where SSF has a house, ate our sandwiches with the Bishop of Dover in Canterbury (representing the Archbishop), made a pilgrimage around Canterbury Cathedral, explored S. Augustine's Abbey and S. Martins (the church with the longest tradition of Christian worship in the British Isles) and finally gathered for Choral Evensong in the Quire of the Cathedral. Hopefully, Francis and Clare were urging us to move forward with faith, hope and love to deepen our baptismal unity in Christ. *f*



Franciscans in Dialogue beside Greyfriars, where the first friars in the UK lived in the thirteenth century. The SSF representation included **Helen Julian** (fourth from left), **Jason Robert** (after next two along), **Colin Wilfred, Daniel, and Derek** (seated); **Joyce** was the photographer.

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Book Reviews

When two ISBN numbers are given in this edition, it is because as from January 2007 the 13 digit numbers will be required when ordering books.

David Brown

Through the Eyes of the Saints

A pilgrimage through history

ISBN 0 8264 7640 6

or 9780 8264 7640 1

Continuum, 2005, £12.99

This is not another collection of lives of the saints! Professor Brown has chosen 33 men and women from the vast list of saints, mostly identified in our liturgical calendar, with the purpose of drawing out how they might challenge us today towards a contemporary holiness. Therefore to explore this book with the expectation of gaining a neat summary of hagiographic detail will only bring disappointment. Rather, Professor Brown draws from four periods of Christian history - the Early Church, the Medieval Church, the Reformation Period and the Modern World - lives of Christians whose responses to the settings of their day also throw a piercing shaft of light upon our own generation with its nagging needs.

Saints are certainly not without sin, as the author rather enjoys reminding his readers. 'Their strength lay in the degree to which, while remaining in those limitations, they also transcended them' (p.158) he says concerning the lives of Archbishops Hannington and Luwum. The material selected, written in short chapters, contains much thought for prayer and is available therefore to be used as a companion to our times of quiet and contemplation. It helps to put a lot of things into perspective. It often disturbs and so demands an urgent resolution.

Damian SSF

Rowan Williams

Why Study the Past?

The Quest for the Historical Church

ISBN 0 2325 2549 8

or 978 0 2325 2549 6

D.L.T., 2005, £8.95

Though fairly short (114 pp), this book is rich fare, demanding slow, attentive reading, but the effort demanded of the reader certainly proves worthwhile. Early on, Archbishop Rowan suggests two reasons why people might not bother sufficiently with church history, ways in which they can 'miss the point'; either that they don't expect to be surprised by the past (a traditionalist viewpoint), or that they don't expect to be interested in or questioned by it (a progressive one, common in our contemporary culture). Throughout the book he challenges these expectations and enlarges our perspective.

The book is expanded from the series of Sarum Theological Lectures given by the author in May 2003. Focussing in particular

on the early Church and the Reformation period, Williams helps us to experience the tension between difference and continuity - the sense in which we are part of the same coherent story as our forebears, grounded in the self-consistency of the God to whom we relate, contrasted with the important recognition that the past is not just 'the present in fancy dress'. Good history is about a real engagement with the strangeness of the past which nevertheless helps us to understand more subtly who and where we are now, and how we have been formed.

I was stimulated by the explosion of one or two myths along the way - the myth of the "Undivided Church" of the first five centuries; various misunderstandings of Luther's thought - but above all in this book we are urged to discover church history as a spiritual discipline rather than just a scientific one, which means it will be a way of decentring the arrogant assumptions of the ego. We learn that humility is the key to bringing the insights of a historical perspective to bear on the complex issues that concern us in the Church today. 'Whether we use the past as an inflexible standard of correctness or neglect it as a record of premodern error, we isolate ourselves from the real life of the past. And when the past in question is that of the Church, that real life is in its ultimate depth the life of Christ.'

Desmond Alban SSF

Malcolm Johnson

St. Martin-in-the-Fields

ISBN 1 86077 323 0

or 9781 8607 7323 5

Phillimore & Co.,

Chichester, 2005, £20

My first recollection of St Martin's is of being taken there by my grandmother one Sunday afternoon when I was about ten years old. Hemmed in by the crowd in a gallery, I could see nothing of what was happening. Gradually I learnt more about this London landmark - that Queen Mary used to go there; of two successive incumbents who drew the crowds, Dick Sheppard (renowned at that time for his ministry among the poor and homeless) and Pat McCormack (the preacher whom I had heard but not seen and whose name became a household word in the early days of broadcasting). St Martin-in-the-Fields may be said to represent the Church of England at its best.

Malcolm Johnson, who has spent years in inner city ministry, latterly based at St. Martin's as the Bishop of London's Advisor on Pastoral Care, has written a comprehensive history of a place close to his heart. From its beginnings in the thirteenth century he tells the story of the church and parish. With detail and humour which bring the tale to life he tells of the buildings, never large enough before the present church designed by James Gibbs was begun in the 1720s, down to the exciting developments now taking place. He tells of incumbents frustrated but at the same time excited by the

place (Sheppard was put off by the pulpit which set him almost as high above the people as was Nelson on his column outside) and of the people - not all admirable - associated with St. Martin's (from King George I as church warden, to the blind beggar who used to sit with his dog outside). He leaves us with a picture of a church which, after centuries of change, is not only a place of worship and prayer, but is 'in touch' with all sorts of people - the poor and homeless, the Chinese community, the world of music through the Academy of St Martin in the Fields - a 'church without walls'.

All this and much else we find in this attractively produced and well illustrated book, which should delight church historians and give heart to those who fear that in our urban society the church counts for little.

Reginald SSF

John Skinner

Hear our Silence

ISBN 085224-46128

or 0852 4461 2899.9

Gracewing, 2004, £9.99

Besides being a Third Order Franciscan, I have an interest in the Carthusians from worshipping regularly at the church in Witham in Somerset. Witham church is the only remaining building of the original English Charterhouse founded by Hugh, later Bishop of Lincoln.

The author was a Jesuit before becoming a journalist and later a writer and lecturer on the English mystics. This enchanting book is about a period one summer spent with the English Carthusians, living in the Charterhouse at Parkminster in Sussex.

He gives a vivid account of his time with the monks, who live the eremitical life within a supportive community. Each has his own detached dwelling with high-walled garden. There are times of communal prayer, following the familiar structure of the seven-fold monastic offices, and the community Eucharist. But Skinner's 'quick computation ... annotated on the timetable revealed that a monk spends eleven hours of

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his day in prayer and spiritual exercises, five hours either working, studying or eating and the remainder asleep in two periods (of four hours and three) separated by the Night Office."

Woven through the narrative is the history of the Carthusian order and gentle, almost loving, insights into their life; he was able to talk to each of the monks individually on the community country walk. The rule and norm is silence, and talking is kept to the minimum required to get a task completed properly, for example, in the kitchen. This astonishingly attractive way of life is encapsulated as "the seeker who journeys into the silent desert of the heart to encounter God."

As a result of his time at Parkminster, Skinner has set up contemplative prayer groups, which sound fairly similar to the more well-known Julian meetings, except that afterwards there is no tea and chat - "the silence is precious and each takes it away within themselves."

I found myself trying to read slowly, to make the book last longer; rationing oneself to four or so pages a day would be a more disciplined approach!

Sandra Hancock TSSF

Jonathan Aitken.

Prayers for People under Pressure.

ISBN 0 8264 7639 2

or 9780 8264 7639 5

Continuum, 2005, £8.99

Jonathan Aitken, ex war correspondent, television presenter, chairman of a merchant bank, and Cabinet Minister, began his prison sentence on 9 June 1999, in HMP Belmarsh, after pleading guilty to charges of perjury at the Old Bailey. But he was well prepared.

For the previous two years, thanks initially to a weekly prayer support group of MPs, he had learnt to pray amidst defeat, disgrace, divorce, bankruptcy and the threat of jail. The journey had involved Father Gerard Hughes, an Alpha course, an Ignatian retreat and much else. This book is the fruit of his experience, and also bears the marks of his two years study at Wycliffe Hall later on.

For those who have their own prayer time in private each day, whether in prison or at home over a cup of coffee, here is material and advice from someone who has been there, done it, got the T-shirt and is still doing it.

These prayers are from a very wide range of traditions, from the Church Fathers to modern evangelicals, and dipping into the Bible, the Catholic Missal, the Book of Common Prayer, hymns, the lives of saints, and many other sources. Each prayer comes with a page of reflection, about how and why he found the prayer helpful, its history, and its relevance to the Christian life. There is lots to learn and ponder in these reflections which express a broad and catholic knowledge of Christian tradition. Well worth reading, with something to chew on.

I particularly liked his short autobiographical introduction, 'journey into prayer', describing his downfall, his repentance, and his experience of prison. Saint Francis also found the experience of prison rewarding. His prayer, 'My God, my all' is included.

Amos SSF

Anselm Grun

Angels of Grace

ISBN 0 8264 7655 4

or 9780 8264 7655 5

Continuum, London, 2005, £7.99

Anselm Grun, a monk of the Benedictine abbey of Munster-Schwarzach in South Germany, is a prolific writer of best-selling religious books, translated widely. *Angels of Grace* is translated by Dinah Livingstone, and illustrated with line drawings by Penelope Harper characterising the 50 different angels. The angels, messengers of God, invite readers to receive various virtues on their journey to God. Each virtue is succinctly and tellingly described and can be read to start one's daily meditation /contemplation. Behind them is sound psychological (Jungian) knowledge, and between them they cover a wide range of human experience. For instance: Love, Reconciliation, Community, Risk, Patience,

Parting, Cheerfulness, Prudence, Devotion and Compassion.

What I miss in the book is reference to the energy of the indwelling Holy Spirit, with the result that the reader could be left to try harder to go along the paths the angels point to by their own efforts. I also question the introspection involved. But I recognise that I overlook the ample Biblical evidence of God sending angel messengers who actually lead recipients to receive the messages and the power of God involved. And I hear that the New Age younger people have angels prominently in their spirituality.

Bernard SSF

First Things

The Moral, Social and

Religious Challenges of the Day

Text of lectures by Cherie Booth, Charles

Moore, George Weigel, Gyles Brandreth

ISBN 9780 8601 2388 0

Burns and Oates, London 2005

Published in association with the

Tyburn Community, £9.99

These four essays are the texts of the first four annual lectures delivered at the Tyburn Convent of the Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Montmartre, Order of Saint Benedict.

At this convent in Hyde Park Place in west London, as we are told in an advertisement at the end of this paperback, the nuns 'pray night and day ... to honour the 105 Catholic martyrs who suffered and died for their faith on the scaffold of Tyburn Tree between 1535 and 1681.' Cherie Booth, QC (the Prime Minister's spouse) in the opening paragraph of her lecture, put the history of Tyburn into perspective; giving the estimate that (p.45) 'some 50,000 people were put to death here over the 600 years that it served as a place of execution'. Ms Booth reminds readers that Catholics here and throughout Europe were not always the ones 'at the receiving end' of such denial of individual rights.

There is no definite statement about a specific remit given to the four lecturers but we can take it that it included the quotation from the Archbishop of Westminster given in the Foreword, 'It is important that the Catholic community contributes to the public life and discourse of our country, especially in relation to the moral, religious and social challenges of the day.'

Charles Moore, a journalist and political columnist, gave the first lecture (presumably 2001). He chose to begin with some historical details of Tyburn but used it to speak of the value of witness to truth not only in matters of faith but for human rights. In the second lecture, a former Member of Parliament, broadcaster, interviewer and biographer, regrets the loss of innocent play in childhood and links this to much adolescent crime and unsocial behaviour. It is possible the four speakers felt some restraint in the conditions of the lectureship but within those confines they have reflected what most would agree with.

Andrew SSF



SISTER ELSIE FELICITY

OSC

Died 7 September 2006

Elsie Watts was a founder member of the Second Order of SSF and lived in the Freeland enclosure from 1950 until her death. She was Mother for twelve years, and offered friendship and guidance to many who consulted her. Members of the First Order, in particular, are very conscious of the hidden, sacrificial life of the Clares, and of Sister Elsie Felicity's part in that. May she rest in peace, and rise in glory.

Pilgrimage for Peace: The Pilgrims of St Francis

Seventy years ago, outside the walls of Assisi, Fr Algy SSF met a group of Roman Catholic pilgrims. Called 'Les Compagnons de S. François', they had been founded 10 years before by young French and German Catholics to foster reconciliation between their countries. Since then the movement has spread to the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Portugal - and Britain. The British branch was founded in 1969 and called the 'Pilgrims of St Francis'; from the start First and Third Order brothers and sisters have been involved. Kathleen Holford of the Third Order SSF has played a leading role in the movement and was both the first woman and the first non-Roman Catholic to be the International Guardian of the whole organisation.

Kathleen writes:

The Pilgrims of St Francis is an international, ecumenical movement, whose aims are peace, social justice and Christian unity. Its members strive to answer the call of God to work with God's plan to bring about the harmony of all creation by following Jesus Christ after the style of Saint Francis of Assisi.

We see pilgrimage as an outward journey with an inner meaning. It is a microcosm of our whole life's pilgrimage with its joys and sorrows and opportunities for service. It is an enjoyable holiday, but it is more than that, an act of worship and witness and an exercise in community living. We do not necessarily have a geographical goal, as do many other pilgrimages, which go to famous shrines. The route itself becomes the centre of our way of life, of life's journey to God. The spirit of pilgrimage is life always on the move, going out from the known into the unknown; not being afraid to move on in ideas and thoughts.

Each year an international pilgrimage is organised by the participating countries in turn. It is an opportunity to live in Franciscan simplicity without the trappings of our everyday life, carrying everything in a rucksack which we see as a symbol of our walking through life. During the pilgrimage we are divided into groups of twenty to twenty-five people, trying to give a mixture of ages and nationalities, making sure that there are enough people with language skills to interpret for people in their group. People

of all ages are welcome; for example last year the youngest was seven weeks old and the oldest, eighty five years. Those who, because of age or infirmity cannot walk the route, are accommodated in a Centre group, where they follow the same programme as the walking groups, without the physical exercise. The walking groups move each day, sleeping on the floors of parish or village halls or in barns.

Every ten years since 1927, the pilgrimage goes to Assisi, all countries helping in the preparation. National Pilgrimages are also held in each country every year, mostly in the summer, and several national movements have weekend pilgrimages and reunions of local groups. A typical day on pilgrimage begins with a meditation before breakfast. Several times during the week, a Eucharist is celebrated in an informal way, often out of doors in a field with an altar constructed of piled up rucksacks. After breakfast we clean up our accommodation, boasting that we leave it cleaner than when we arrived. Then comes the call to 'sac a dos' and we set off towards our next destination, often singing as we go. The housekeeper and the day's volunteer cooks sometimes have to stop for shopping and sometime during the day we pause for the discussion time.

One feature of the yearly calendar is the International Chapter at Pentecost, following the example of St Francis who called his brothers together for a chapter at that time. Each country also has a National Chapter. These Chapters are times of discussion,

following a theme decided internationally and followed during the year in every country and at every meeting, starting on St Francis day. One recent theme was 'violence', and another, 'choice'. The International Chapter leader gathers suggestions from every country to develop the



Kathleen Holford TSSF

theme and notes are translated and distributed to each country.

Each country has a committee of people, known as the Guardiannat. This committee sends the National Guardian and one other representative to the International Guardiannat which meets twice a year in different locations in Europe. Each country publishes a regular magazine, whose articles are often shared between countries.

Once you have been part of a group on pilgrimage, sharing its life, walking together, praying, singing, cooking and sleeping together, you find you have friends for life. Every pilgrim's home is open to you and many visit each other between pilgrimages in different countries.

The International Pilgrimage for 2007 will take place in Italy around Assisi, 24 July -1 August; the U.K. National Pilgrimage will be from Sherborne to Glastonbury, on 18-25 August. Further details available from Mr S. Isitt, National publicity Officer PSF, 25 Renfrew Court, Allfrey Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN22 7SZ, or from the National Guardian, Gill Myall, email: gillmyall@hotmail.com *f*

The Small Beatitudes

Blessed are those who can laugh at themselves;
they will have no end of fun.

Blessed are those who can tell a mountain from a molehill;
they will be saved a lot of bother.

Blessed are those who know how to relax without looking for excuses;
they are on their way to being wise.

Blessed are those who think before acting and pray before thinking;
they will avoid many blunders.

Above all, blessed are you who recognise the Lord in all you meet;
the light of truth shines in your life for you have found true wisdom.

Joseph Folliet
Founder of Les Compagnons de S. François

From *The Crusader*, magazine of the Conventual Franciscan Friars



En route: a stop for Eucharist